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Forty-seventh session
Item 11 of the provisional agenda

FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION

Written statement submitted by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and the Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV)

[29 November 1990]

GE.90-14006/8744A

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

1. The millions of people who are uprooted from their communities but remain within their national borders are called internally displaced persons. Persons who are internally displaced are to be found in all regions of the world. Displacement is a global problem which affects more than 30 million persons. Some individuals are displaced because of government policy or natural disasters but the majority are uprooted because of war or civil strife. They may find themselves in situations where they do not enjoy the protection of their Government and are often subject to serious human rights violations.

2. People who are internally displaced have been virtually ignored by the international community and no inter-governmental organization is mandated to provide assistance and protection to them. However, when these persons are displaced either through armed conflict or internal strife, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), according to its mandate as a specifically neutral and independent institution and intermediary, endeavours to ensure them protection and assistance. In other situations voluntary agencies provide some assistance to internally displaced persons and are concerned about the many serious violations of their human rights.

3. In the case of armed conflict, persons displaced within their countries are protected by fundamental guarantees relating to the treatment of persons who do not take part in hostilities, under article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and in the Second Additional Protocol of 1977 which relate to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts. In other situations existing human rights standards are applicable but they are not designed to meet some of the very special needs of internally displaced persons.

4. The United Nations must examine the root causes of displacement, assess the mandates of organizations working for certain categories of this vulnerable group and assume greater responsibility for protection and assistance to the other persons who do not benefit from these mandates.

5. As a first step, we ask the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its forty-seventh session to adopt a resolution along the following lines:

Mindful of its general humanitarian mandate under the Charter of the United Nations to promote and encourage respect for human rights,

Recalling that when persons are displaced following armed conflicts or internal strife, the International Committee of the Red Cross, acting according to its mandate as a specifically neutral and independent institution and intermediary, as recognized in the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement endeavours to ensure them protection and assistance,

Noting the report of the Secretary-General concerning the International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa (A/44/520),

Further noting the report of the Governing Board of the United Nations Development Programme entitled "Refugees and Displaced Persons: The Present and Future Role of UNDP" (DP/1990/66),

Recalling decision 90/22 of 22 June 1990 adopted by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme at its thirty-seventh session,

Welcomes Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/78 entitled "Refugees, displaced persons and returnees", adopted at its second regular session,

Deeply disturbed by the suffering and numbers of displaced persons throughout the world who have been forced to flee their homes and seek shelter and safety in other parts of their own country,

Conscious of the fact that human rights violations, armed conflicts, internal strife, forced resettlement programmes, environmental disasters and systematic economic deprivation are some of the many and complex factors causing displacement of persons,

Concerned that displaced persons encounter serious protection and assistance problems,

1. Invites all Governments and international organizations to intensify their co-operation and assistance in world-wide efforts to address the serious problems resulting from internal displacement;

2. Urges States to comply with human rights obligations undertaken and international humanitarian law;

3. Invites the Secretary-General to take into account the protection needs of displaced persons in his system-wide review of ensuring an effective response by the United Nations system to the problems of refugees, displaced persons and returnees;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on Human Rights at its forty-eighth session an analytical report on internally displaced persons taking into account information submitted by Governments, specialized agencies, relevant United Nations organs, regional intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in consultative status;

5. Decides to consider this matter at its forty-eighth session under the agenda item entitled "Further promotion and encouragement of human rights and fundamental freedoms...".

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